

## Tracking Environmental Progress - Earth Day 2005

Delo, April 21, 2005

On April 22, 1970, 20 million Americans gathered to celebrate the first Earth Day. They forged a grass-roots movement to clean up the environment and protect it from future harm. Many Americans continue to renew their commitment to the natural environment on this annual occasion. As we mark the 35th anniversary of Earth Day, citizens of the United States will reflect on how we can work together to improve our environment, by joining a local environmental project, resolving to walk or ride a bike to work, or even to plant a tree. Here in Slovenia, I will celebrate by joining France Ekar, the President of the Planinska Zveza Slovenije, and the Mayor of Preddvor for a nature walk organized by the Planinska sekcija of Preddvor and the Preddvor Obcina to learn more about Slovenia's natural and cultural inheritance.

There is plenty of good news this Earth Day. Like others in Europe, Slovenes have done much for a cleaner environment, both through legislation and increased public awareness and education. I enjoy the fruits of that concern every time I hike in your beautiful forests. In 1970, our forests were threatened and Americans were concerned over the rate of deforestation in the United States. But today the amount of U.S. forest land, some of it the product of commercial forestry, is approximately the same as 100 years ago. Some 76 million acres (about 31 million hectares) are held in "reserve," managed as national parks and wilderness. Much of the protected forests in the West are in stands more than 100 years old. President Bush's Healthy Forests Initiative is instrumental in maintaining that protection from disease, infestation and fire, and in restoring our forests to their natural beauty and conditions.

The quality of U.S. air and water is also far better today than on the first Earth Day in 1970. In the last 30 years, our nation's economy has grown more than 170 percent while energy consumption grew only 45 percent. In other words, the amount of energy used to produce each dollar of economic growth decreased by 44 percent.

The United States is working to build on the results of these last 30 years. Three years ago, President Bush committed the United States to an ambitious climate change strategy that will reduce domestic greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions relative to the size of the American economy. The United States will achieve this goal by cutting its GHG intensity - how much it emits per unit of economic activity - by 18 percent over the next 10 years. This plan will prevent more than 500 million metric tons of greenhouse gases from entering the atmosphere - equivalent to taking 70 million cars off the road. These measures will produce some of the most dramatic advancements in clean air protection since passage of the Clean Air Act Amendments of 1990.

Despite these reductions, critics doubt the commitment of the United States to addressing climate change and point to the U.S. refusal to sign the Kyoto Protocol as proof. The fact is that, while we all agree on the need to fight global warming, the Kyoto Protocol restrains the economic growth needed to provide the resources to invest in clean technologies. It would have meant the loss of nearly \$400 billion in US GDP and up to 4.9 million lost American jobs. A good number of the

signatories in Europe will fail to meet their targets for the same reason: they are not prepared to see further drops in GDP and jobs. Instead, the U.S. has led the effort to develop new emerging technologies such as hydrogen-powered vehicles, electricity from renewable resources and clean coal technology. The International Fusion Reactor (ITER), a multilateral collaboration for renewable energy, began almost nineteen years ago as a U.S.-Soviet initiative.

The United States is committed to developing these new technologies and expertise and sharing them with developing economies. The 2005 U.S. federal budget included \$5.8 billion for activities related to climate change - an increase of almost 14 percent -- with more than \$200 million for technology transfer to developing countries.

With smarter regulations, economies can grow and pollution can be cut. With this in mind, the Bush Administration is currently working to build on the successful cap and trade rules that since 1990 have reduced sulfur dioxide (SO<sub>2</sub>) emissions by about 40 percent. And they did this at half the cost of traditional approaches to curbing SO<sub>2</sub> emissions. ("Cap and trade" refers to a system where a maximum limit is set for harmful emissions. Portions of that limited amount are allocated to participants who then are free to buy and sell those rights after the initial allocation.) President Bush's Clear Skies legislation would rely on similar market mechanisms to cut SO<sub>2</sub> emissions another 73 percent. Emissions of nitrogen oxides would be reduced by 67 percent, and mercury emissions would be cut by 69 percent. The cap and trade system, with its incentives for early reductions, will ensure that improvements come sooner and cost less.

At the 2002 United Nations World Summit on Sustainable Development, world leaders, including delegates from the United States, committed to work for better water and sanitation, modernized energy sources, improved public health, more productive agriculture and better protection and management of natural resources. Since then, the United States has established bilateral and regional partnerships that will cover over 72 percent of the world's greenhouse gas emissions. President George W. Bush pledged to "work with nations, especially the poor and developing nations, to show the world that there is a better approach, that we can build our future prosperity along a cleaner and better path."

This Earth Day, we should celebrate the remarkable progress that we have all made over the last three decades, but we should continue to be mindful of the challenges ahead. Every nation in the world shares the goal of a cleaner, safer and healthier environment, and our continued cooperation worldwide today will surely result in an even better tomorrow.